

The Secret of Life

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(Editor's note: This paper by Rachel Moore is the winner of the LCSR Program Director's Award for the best paper dealing with a social problem in the 2006 issue of the Agora.)

We spend so much time searching for meaning in our lives, and the secret to contentment. We are constantly asking the question of how to be a whole person, but what is the secret of life? As country singer Faith Hill writes in her song, "The Secret of Life," is it in the little parts of life, or is there really no secret at all?

In the Sumerian epic, *Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, tries to figure out this question as he searches for immortality after the death of his good friend Enkidu. Gilgamesh is wandering about the forest trying to find Utnapishtim, whom he wants to question about immortality. Along the way, he meets Siduri, the woman of the vine and maker of wine. She tells him:

As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things; day and night, night and day, dance and be merry, feast and rejoice. Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this too is the lot of man (34).

At this point in his life, Gilgamesh is consumed with a grief that he cannot shake, and he fears his own death, thus making it impossible for him to enjoy life. His response to Siduri is, "How can I be silent, how can I rest, when Enkidu whom I love is dust, and I too shall die and be laid in the earth?" (34). Fear grips Gilgamesh, and until he can learn to overcome his fear, he can never enjoy the day to day parts of life: food, dance, cleanliness, children, and the intimacy of a soul mate. Gilgamesh ultimately learns that he cannot obtain immortality, and the epic ends with the kingdom of Uruk mourning his death.

Too often in each of our lives some type of fear gets to us, such as Gilgamesh's fear of death, to the point that we forget to enjoy the little things. A fear of failure, for example, will make us spend all of our time in college with our nose in a book, which will leave no time for the enjoyment of life's pleasures.

The Da Vinci Code also explores problems that hinder our completeness as humans, but on a much different note. Dan Brown writes, "Actually, Da Vinci was in tune with the balance between male and female. He believed that a human soul could not be enlightened unless it had both male and female elements" (120). This approach suggests that humans cannot be complete without both male and female. Feminists would love to argue this point, but it is actually quite obvious. A major focus of our lives, especially as we hit the twenty-something years and above, is finding a significant other. It is a drive that, for most of us, goes down to the very marrow of our bones. We long for love and companionship and sadly will often do anything to get it.

However, simply discussing a desire for a soul mate does not do Brown's theory justice. Brown is also referring to the completeness that a male and female union brings about. Traditionally, females are more emotional, and men are more rational. Both emotions and rationality are needed in this world, for without emotion we are cold-hearted, and without rationality we cannot ever see the big picture. Only when there is a union of male and female, and thus a fusion of rationality and emotion, do we become whole.

In Brown's novel, the concept of wholeness involving both male and female and the notion of femininity and sex being sacred are explained through Sophie Neveu and Robert Langdon's search to understand the Priory of Sion, a secret society whose job is to protect the royal bloodline of Christ. However, Sophie and Robert do not know the goal of their search until the end of the novel; therefore, they are sent on a hunt to decode riddles in order to understand the Priory's secret. Along the way, they learn the ancient traditions of the Priory, including the sacred sexual

practices. For the Priory of Sion, the unity of male and female is literally the secret of life: it is how to be whole and complete.

However, there is also another point to consider in finding the secret and meaning of life: simple acceptance of life. Chuang Chou writes in his essay "Discussion on Making All Things Equal" in the book *Chuang Tzu*:

Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence—music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one knows where they sprout from. Let it be! Let it be! [Is it enough that] morning and evening we have them, and they are the means by which we live. Without them we would not exist; without us they would have nothing to take hold of. (558)

Here, Chou is suggesting that we must let go; these negative things exist, and we must accept that. Chou is a Daoist, and therefore to him, the secret of life is to let go of everything and accept it. Chou advocates acceptance of joy at certain times in our lives and acceptance of anger and disappointment at other times.

For Gilgamesh, Chou's attitude would mean that he should let go of his search for immortality and admit to himself that he is mortal. However, this admission of mortality is not necessarily a bad thing, for only then can he begin to enjoy the parts of life that Siduri mentioned to him: food, dance, cleanliness, children, and the intimacy of a soul mate. For Sophie and Langdon, to let go means letting go of their preconceived notions about male and female, and no longer believing that females are a lesser gender. It means letting go of the concept of sex as a "dirty" or "sinful" act, and rather looking at sexual intercourse between male and female as an act of unity, wholeness, and completeness. For Sophie, it also means letting go of all the anger towards her grandfather that she has pent up over the years and experiencing meaning in life in a new way.

Three ideas of the secret to life are presented in the texts mentioned above: letting go of fear in order to enjoy the little pleasures of life, needing both male and female views to be complete, and accepting the aspects of life that cannot be changed. By learning how to put each of these secrets of life together and applying them to our lives, we will become content with life. Many of us fear death or other things, just as Gilgamesh did. Many of us also harbor anger towards the opposite sex. Maybe the greatest secret of life is to let go, as Chou suggests.

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Jacques Saunier tells his granddaughter, "Life is filled with secrets. You can't learn them all at once" (Brown 101). A message that is currently circulating over Instant Messenger goes, "Maybe it's not worrying about what's down the road or where you will end up, but enjoying where you are right now." When we put all of the pieces we know about the secret of life together, it is very possible that this secret may take a lifetime to learn, and part of that secret is acknowledging that the future will exist, but not worrying about its particulars, but being content with the lives we have right now. Just let it be!

Works Cited

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